



Dana E. Blackwell  
Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**COMMISSIONERS:**  
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ANN E. FRANZEN  
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SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR  
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR  
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS  
STACEY F. WINKLER

## APPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **April 17, 2006**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi  
Patricia Curry  
Ann E. Franzen  
Susan F. Friedman  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Daisy Ma  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Wendy L. Ramallo  
Sandra Rudnick  
Adelina Sorkin

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Hon. Joyce Fahey  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams  
Stacey F. Winkler

### YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

Jason Anderson  
William Johnson

### APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the April 17, 2006, meeting was unanimously approved as amended.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the April 3, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved.

## **CHAIR'S REPORT**

- The death of Chief Probation Officer Paul Higa following a recent stroke is a major loss to the county and its children and families, and Chair Kleinberg expressed condolences to his family and staff.
- In partnership with Casey Family Programs and the California Youth Connection, DCFS is hosting another quarterly Speak Out event on April 27 from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. in Pasadena. Foster youth are encouraged to attend and express their views on placement, independent living services, etc. Rhelda Shabazz will provide the Commission with materials on the issues raised at this and previous events.
- Lisa Mandel is leaving the Children's Law Center to become vice president of programs at Chrysalis, an agency that helps adults in poverty deal with homelessness, unemployment, lack of housing, and so on. Chair Kleinberg praised Ms. Mandel's long record of child advocacy with respect to the court system, her service on innumerable committees, and her helping to found the Children's Law Center, giving dependent children their own attorneys and ending the dual-representation practice of County Counsel's appearing for both them and the children's services department. Chair Kleinberg presented Ms. Mandel with a plaque of appreciation, saying that child welfare in Los Angeles County would not be where it is today without her.
- Commissioner Curry reviewed the history behind SB 1576, proposed legislation that would restructure the provision of transitional housing and services for emancipated youth. AB 427 originally mandated these services some years ago with a 60/40 state-county funding split, and the county has been taking its share from the independent living program budget, reducing it considerably. The proposed legislation asks for 100 percent state funding, and it is hoped that any negotiations would cap the county match at 20 percent or less. The Board of Supervisors heard the text of the legislation at its meeting last week, and will take a formal stance tomorrow.

With a \$1 million grant from the Every Child Foundation, Hillside's Home for Children has recently purchased and renovated an apartment building that will offer 20 apartments for former foster youth—at rents starting as low as \$50 per month and rising as they become employable—with the rest of the building being occupied by community residents whose rent will subsidize the foster youth spaces. The Hillside's program also includes a full-time director who will regularly meet with and monitor the youth. A dedication for the apartment building is planned for May 25, and the event will be used as a press conference to support the proposed legislation.

**Commissioner Biondi moved that the draft letter of support for SB 1576 included in meeting packets be sent, pending a supportive vote by the Board of Supervisors. Commissioner McClaney seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Commissioner McClaney moved that permission be given to**

**name the Commission as a supporter on the invitations to the Hillside apartment building dedication. Commissioner Biondi seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**

#### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Dr. Sanders reviewed some of the changes resulting from the new Title IV-e waiver granted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Historically, cases eligible for IV-e monies were those of children in out-of-home care whose families met certain income ceilings; funding was then dependent on the type of placement (licensed group home or foster home, certified foster home, or approved relative care). Title IV-e paid for maintenance (room and board), administrative costs, the CWS/CMS computer system, training, licensing, and a passthrough to Probation Department staff; it did not pay for services to families. Revenue was generated only when children were in out-of-home care; as that number dropped as a result of departmental goals, so did Federal revenues. Additionally, family income eligibility was set at a 1997 rate, with no cost-of-living increases; in 1996, 90 percent of children were eligible, but that figure is now down to 80 percent and will keep falling. Nationally, foster care populations have been decreasing since the early 2000s, but administrative costs have been going up, which has spurred increased Federal scrutiny.

With the new waiver, all children are eligible. The department will essentially get a block grant from the Federal government—approximately \$370 million in the waiver's first year to about \$400 in its fifth and last year—that can be used for services intended to prevent placement, to reunify families, and to establish permanency options. Included are all maintenance and administration dollars, the passthrough to Probation, and adoption assistance, which can grow at an average of 15 percent over the five-year period. (Anything beyond that will need to be reimbursed by the state or county, but unless many more children come into care, Dr. Sanders does not foresee an increase at that level.) What's not included is funding for training, licensing (Los Angeles County does not do its own licensing, but other jurisdictions do), or the CSW/CMS computer system. There is a question about emancipation services, which Dr. Sanders assumed were included but the state says not; negotiations will continue.

Out-of-home placements must still be paid for, of course, but had the terms of the new waiver been in place three years ago, Dr. Sanders said, the department would now have between \$50 and \$60 million to reinvest into alternative services—aftercare for children leaving high-end placements, respite care, intensive family reunification services, therapeutic supports to foster care providers, and support for relative caregivers. He believes that the prevention work group has presented a good planning structure for additional dollars, and there is real potential for expanding services. All children are included; unlike the waiver for wraparound, no control group of children not receiving services is required, since the Federal government agreed to a pre- and post-type of evaluation. However, unless legislative changes are made in Congress, its authority to grant an additional waiver or to further change the funding structure will end in five years.

## **POLICY ROUNDTABLE FOR CHILD CARE**

- The Policy Roundtable for Child Care will vote this month on whether or not to take a stand on Proposition 82, the Preschool for All Act that will establish a year of voluntary free preschool for all California four-year-olds prior to kindergarten. The Commission sits on the Roundtable, and Commissioner Franzen requested discussion around the issue to inform her vote as the Commission's representative.

**Commissioner Biondi moved that the Commission support universal preschool in California; Vice Chair Sorkin seconded the motion. Commissioners Curry, Franzen, Ma, and Ramallo abstained from the vote, which was otherwise unanimously in favor of the motion.**

- A policy paper developed by the Policy Roundtable on controlling asthma in Los Angeles County was included in meeting packets, and Commissioner Franzen again asked for Commission feedback to inform her vote on the document. Commissioners agreed that more information was needed on the ramifications of implementation, and that the Policy Roundtable should be asked to make a presentation before the Commission could take a stand.

## **FAMILY VISITATION GUIDELINES**

Prior to the development of the family visitation guidelines presented by Judge Zeke Zeidler, complaints about visitation had been widespread—that visits were not arranged around family members' schedules, that no detailed plans were made or enforced, and that it was often difficult for parents to maintain the close relationships with their children that are necessary to ward off adoption proceedings. In June 2005, Judge Nash formed the visitation committee that Judge Zeidler co-chaired, and asked dependency system stakeholders to create a policy that everyone would agree to use. After an in-depth literature review, much brainstorming, and numerous drafts, the committee submitted guidelines this March.

The concept behind the new guidelines is not that a single person dictates a schedule, but that the department-based teaming process (team decision-making, family group decision-making, etc.) involves the family in developing a visitation plan that is an integral aspect of the overall treatment plan for the child, and that visitation is addressed in every team meeting held. Written visitation plans will be tailored to the family to specify days, times, and locations for the visits as well as resolve transportation questions. The new plans will stress the activities to take place during visits and outline a set of do's and don'ts—bringing books to read to the child, whether or not food is permissible, and so on. They will also address the various types of supervision or monitoring required, safety assurances, sibling issues, phone contact, and other specifics depending on circumstances. An initial visitation plan will be developed prior to the detention hearing, and the plan revised from that point until disposition. Visitation committee members will train the appropriate attorneys and judicial officers on the new guidelines, and the upcoming Partnership Conference will also hold a workshop.

Commissioner Biondi mentioned youth detained through the Probation Department who sometimes, as punishment, are prevented from visiting with their children. One section of the guidelines deals with incarcerated parents, Judge Zeidler said, but since the document was created for the dependency court, delinquency issues were not specifically addressed. The court's overall policy, however, is never to use visitation as either reward or punishment. Because most children of Probation youth are under the jurisdiction of DCFS, it is the latter department's responsibility to facilitate visitation, regardless of the parents' location. (Commissioner Biondi also mentioned that parents who are incarcerated some distance from their children lose time served against their sentences when they make visits outside the detention facility, a fact of which judges are well aware, according to Judge Zeidler.) Judge Nash invited delinquency representatives to the first meeting of the visitation committee, and the Probation Department has been raising these issues throughout. Judge Zeidler promised to approach Judge Nash about sending the final visitation protocols to the delinquency court.

A big part of the committee's work, Judge Zeidler said, was looking at problems and breakdowns in current procedures. Upwards of five guideline pages are dedicated to various participants' roles and responsibilities, including those of attorneys. Delinquency attorneys, remarked Commissioner Ramallo, may be the first to know that their client even *has* a child, and also need to understand the basic elements of a healthy visitation plan.

Jenna Valentine, a member of the committee representing the Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA), praised the committee's intense collaborative process and said that the next step is understanding the huge cultural change the new protocols require, and empowering everyone to make them work. Another committee member applauded the sound research on which the guidelines are based, and stressed the importance of training and implementation.

Jackie Acosta thanked Judge Zeidler for his work, and also expressed appreciation to Chair Kleinberg, Vice Chair Sorkin, and other stakeholders on the committee. DCFS participation was strong, and the department is well poised to implement these protocols, especially now that the Title IV-e waiver is allowing some monetary flexibility. Family reunification should always be the first permanency option, and the department will be taking steps to review internal policies, incorporate the guidelines into team decision-making processes, work with the unions on caseload shifts, and provide training, resource development, data tracking, and evaluation. The implementation work group will include Family First, a Pomona pilot that incorporates Family to Family principles as well as reduced caseloads for reunification, whose practices are already consistent with the new guidelines. The protocols will be integrated into the concurrent planning and point of engagement rollouts, and 30 supervising children's social workers should be hired and trained within a couple of months to serve as team decision-making facilitators so that process may expand department-wide. The policy section is preparing an 'FYI' publication for late May that will outline core concepts and timelines for implementing the visitation guidelines, and is ensuring that a standardized visitation form may be quickly inte-

grated into team decision-making. Work needs to take place with the regional offices' community partnering and development efforts, and information will be collected both internally and externally regarding the visitations procedures already in place and what is working. The integration of visitation protocols is critical to the department's achieving its overarching strategies, and training will be essential.

Although the committee sought to address every issue, said Mark Miller from DCFS's training section, a training program that sets high standards and corresponds with ongoing cross-systems efforts is crucial. The department plans to build visitation protocols in to ongoing training sessions for concurrent planning, point of engagement, the second phase of strategic decision-making (which will also evaluate the quality of the visitation), the core academy, and the five-day training for team decision-making facilitators. Work will need to be expanded with caregivers, foster family homes, group homes, foster care in-services, and relative caregivers to bring them into the process. Areas of training will include the challenges of assessment, how to develop a visitation plan during the teaming process, and implementing and monitoring a plan by aligning with resource providers and other supports.

Joi Russell complimented Judge Zeidler's leadership with the passionate group of stakeholders on the committee, and commended the guidelines' message of a dedication to children and families and a reinforcement of a strength-based approach to their needs. Visitation plans have been piloted in her regional office with no resistance from social workers, who see first-hand the stress of the children without their families, and what's needed for reunification. Support groups of birth families have brought to light many prior problems with visitations, and clear instructions from the outset on length, quality, number, and frequency will help immensely.

Vice Chair Sorkin raised the idea of volunteers assisting with monitored visits, and also asked about locating or creating home-like places, such as those she observed in San Antonio, Texas, for families to visit in. The resource committee will consider both issues, and Vice Chair Sorkin offered to serve on that body.

### **HOLLYWOOD CPR**

Kevin Considine, whose family has been immersed in the entertainment industry for generations and whose personal background includes crew and art department experience in film, founded Hollywood Cinema Production Resources in 1997. On its LAX-adjacent campus, the organization trains young adults—with an emphasis on emancipated foster youth—in the skills and crafts of film and theater, in classes taught by industry professionals. The program is free of charge and has a capacity of hundreds, and is looking for students.

Because of Mr. Considine's relationships with the various unions, he was able to negotiate with them to make Hollywood CPR a signatory on the overall IATSE agreement, so that the industry professionals who teach and develop program curricula get regular union benefits, and so that program graduates can qualify as IATSE union permits. Because of

its years providing tax write-offs for the studios, the organization also maintains strong relationships with the graduates' ultimate employers.

Mr. Considine conceived Hollywood CPR after the elimination of shop and art classes in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and partnered with Laura Peterson (whose background is in education, nonprofits, fundraising, and child care) to start a nonprofit prop house, to which film studios could donate props and set dressing at the end of a shoot, rather than throwing most of that material away. From a disused aviation training center associated with West Los Angeles College, the organization rents out the donated props to generate income.

Students range from 18 to 25 (and may be age 17 if they are seniors in high school) and receive high school or college credit for their classes. Approximately 20 percent are union members' children or the offspring of studio executives, but priority for most slots is reserved for youth coming from historically underserved and economically disadvantaged areas of Los Angeles, who demonstrate passion and commitment to the crafts of the entertainment industry. They are trained in entry-level jobs such as set lighting, editing, grip, costume manufacturing, set dressing, prop making, stage craft, and cinematography. The curriculum fluctuates depending on which unions are expecting retirees, which have new members, and which are experiencing periods of unemployment, so that students are not being trained for jobs that will not exist. Once they are employed, they can expect starting wages from \$18 to \$30 per hour.

Successful candidates are looking to work with their hands in physical kinds of jobs; no acting, writing, or animation is taught. Depending on the individual's skill and education level, training takes a minimum of 10 weeks, two days a week, though some students are involved for a couple of years, circulating while they study through jobs in the prop house, soliciting studio donations, or auctioning off materials. A strong life skills component is part of the program, and a second job, a drivers license, and a checking account are all required, so that students will be prepared for the realities of the industry when they are on their own.

Hollywood CPR is holding one of its regular open houses on April 25 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. at their campus at 9700 South Sepulveda Boulevard, at the corner of 98th and Sepulveda in West Los Angeles. All crafts and teachers will be represented, and individuals can meet them, learn about the training fields, and pick up applications. Everyone was encouraged to attend and bring youth who might be interested. Directions and more information are available at <http://www.hollywoodcpr.org> or at (310) 258-0123.

Rhelda Shabazz from DCFS's emancipation section reported that she will send staff and students to the open house, and that she will invite the organization to meet with the community colleges and perhaps make presentations in the regional offices, as well as link them with the online independent living website and inform transition service centers coordinators about the program. Public transportation to the campus from the eastern half of the county can be difficult, but the new bus from Union Station to LAX terminates

nearby. Its cost is \$6.00 per roundtrip, which is high for most students. Mr. Considine is working on getting that subsidized for Hollywood CPR students.

Other suggestions to get the word out about the program included informing United Friends of the Children and reaching out through religious organizations. The program is also open to youth in the probation system.

Youth representative William Johnson participated in Hollywood CPR during the summer of 2004, before returning to school, and said that he had most enjoyed learning to work as a team. Especially for foster youth, Ms. Peterson said, the fact that work crews become like small families is particularly positive.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**